1985

"Failed Love" in the Drama of Edward Albee

Steven Leonard Long
Eastern Illinois University

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates who have written formal theses.

SUBJECT: Permission to reproduce theses.

The University Library is receiving a number of requests from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow theses to be copied.

Please sign one of the following statements:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

August 1, 1985

Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University not allow my thesis be reproduced because _____

_____

_____

_____ _____

Date Author

m

"FAILED LOVE" IN THE DRAMA

OF EDWARD ALBEE

(TITLE)

BY

Steven Leonard Long

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1985

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

5 August 1985
DATE

31 July 1985
DATE

3 August 1985
DATE

5 Aug 1985
DATE

DEDICATED WITH
DEEP RESPECT AND ADMIRATION
TO

EDWARD ALBEE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the following for their gracious support, guidance, patience, and understanding during the completion of this project:

Dr. R. Rogers
Dr. V. Bobb
Dr. L. Gabbard
The EIU Housing Office.
and, especially
Joe Wheeler
&
Dan Sprehe

ABSTRACT

The plays of Edward Albee are frequently examinations of characters who are unable to love or to be loved. A central and recurring conflict which runs through many of Albee's plays is the conflict which stems from the lack of success which the characters often experience as they strive to find love. The uncertainty and ambiguity which surround the abstraction called "love" leave the characters with feelings of unhappiness, frustration, fear, self-hatred, and despondency. Though the individuals in Albee's plays are aware that love is the ingredient which is missing from their lives, none knows how to go about alleviating such a emotional deficiency. The result is a collection of characters who desperately want love, but who are, nevertheless, totally unequipped to attain it.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate and examine the pervasiveness of "failed love" and to explore it as a theme in the drama of Edward Albee. Utilizing examples from five representative Albee works--The Zoo Story, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, A Delicate Balance, All Over, and Seascape--as well as previous criticism on Albee's drama, I will analyze the "failed love" theme. A framework for examining the phenomenon of "love" is provided by the inclusion of insights and observations on the topic from Dr. Erich Fromm's The Art of Loving (1956). Though other critics have alluded to the significance of the "failed love" theme in Albee's plays. few have delved deeply into the area and none has provided a working definition of "love" or criteria to differentiate love from other similar (but inferior) phenomena. The goal of the present study is to give greater insight into the forces at work in Albee's powerful drama by showing the major role that love and its routine failure play in the development of the theme and plot of each play.

This examination will focus chiefly on four specific areas in which Albee's characters routinely fail in their quests for love. After briefly discussing the philosophies of Albee and Fromm on the subject of Man's alienation and his need for love, I will provide an overview of the prevalence of the problem of alienation in twentieth-century Western culture. Each of the remaining sections will deal with one of the obstacles to the achievement of love which regularly surface in the plays of Edward Albee. Specifically, those obstacles include: chronic passivity, personal immaturity, a lack of love during childhood, and an inability to love oneself.

"FAILED LOVE" IN THE DRAMA OF EDWARD ALBEE

by
Steven Leonard Long
Master of Arts in English

THESIS
Eastern Illinois University
1985

INTRODUCTION

In 1977, Edward Albee's one-act play Counting the Ways had its first American performance at The Hartford Stage Company. Though nearly twenty years had elapsed since Albee's first one-act, The Zoo Story, made its American debut in 1960, the opening line of Counting the Ways demonstrated the accuracy of the old adage "The more things change, the more they stay the same." On a notably simple stage setting consisting of only a small table and two chairs surrounded by bare walls, the play's only two characters--He and She--sit reading. Suddenly, She looks up to ask He, "Do you love me?" With a single question, she has neatly summarized a central issue which has consistently plagued Albee's characters since he began writing plays a quarter of a century ago. Albee's plays are almost always concerned with the possibilities, the problems, the perameters, the pragmatics, the pitfalls, and the promises of love. The ambiguities which pervade thoughts of love leave Albee's characters perplexed and afraid--terrified to pursue the uncharted depths of love, but fearful of a life without it.

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate and examine the pervasiveness of "failed love" and to explore it as a theme in the drama of Edward Albee. Utilizing examples from representative Albee plays, previous criticism on his works, and insights and observations about love from The Art of Loving (1956) by noted psychologist Dr. Erich Fromm, I will analyze Albee's recurrent "failed love" theme. Though other critics have alluded to the significance of such a theme in Albee's plays, few have delved extensively into the area and none has provided a framework for defining and explaining the phenomenon of love as Albee treats it.

For the purpose of the present examination, I have chosen for

several reasons to concentrate on five of Albee's original dramatic works--a one-act, The Zoo Story (1959), and four full-length plays, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), A Delicate Balance (1966), All Over (1971), and Seascape (1975): (1) because they are among Albee's best, most effective, most critically respected plays; (2) because, combined, they demonstrate the range of Albee's maturing vision of the causes and effects of "failed love"; (3) because they are all original works (as opposed to adaptions of works by other authors) and are presumably more concerned with theme that with form; and (4) because, due to the limited scope of this study, I must regrettably exclude some of Albee's plays (though I believe that they, too, include examples of "failed love").

This examination will focus chiefly on four specific areas in which Albee's characters routinely fail in their quests for love. After briefly discussing the philosophies of Albee and Fromm on the subject of Man's alienation and his need for love, I will provide an overview of the prevalence of the problem of alienation in twentieth-century Western culture. Each of the remaining sections will deal with one of the obstacles to the achievement of love in the plays of Edward Albee. Specifically, I will elaborate on the following obstacles:

1. Chronic passivity. Because many of the characters take a passive attitude toward life, they operate in a "death in life" state in which love cannot exist.
2. Personal immaturity. Childishness, "game playing," and other infantile forms of behavior illustrate a stage of "emotional infancy" in which many of Albee's characters are locked.
3. A lack of love during childhood. Such lack has left many of

Albee's characters to doubt their own self-worth and to seek the love of others in the same way that a small child seeks the love of his parents.

4. The inability to love oneself. This study will ultimately argue that it is this stage which most generally stops Albee's characters from achieving the love of others, since the attainment of such a goal is impossible if one does not initially love oneself.

Before examining "love" in Albee's drama, I will comment on the studies and background of Erich Fromm and cite some reasons for the inclusion of his particular perspective in this study. Don Hausdorff has summarized Fromm's credentials this way:

> Psychoanalyst, social theorist and critic, ethical philosopher, teacher and best-selling author: Erich Fromm has been all of these during a long and productive career. As much as any person in our time, he has sought to confront our moral and intellectual dilemmas and to comprehend a humanity that seems resolutely determined to destroy itself (3).

Fromm's The Art of Loving appeared in 1956--three years prior to Albee's The Zoo Story--"in a period when love manuals and sex manuals were rapidly flooding the market" (Hausdorff 97). His book is based on the premise that "love is an art" and therefore "requires knowledge and effort" just as the development of any art requires these (Art 1). Fromm's book is not a "how-to" guide, however. "Fromm quickly warned away those who expected 'easy instruction in the art of loving'" (Hausdorff 97). His book details the psychological principles which lie behind Man's need for love, the substitutes for love which are commonly found in our society and why they are inferior to love itself, the various objects

of love, and, finally, some prerequisites for the effective practice of love.

Fromm's approach is unique because of its singular demand for the active involvement of the reader. The burden of finding "love" (as opposed to a "lover") is entirely on the reader, who must take control of his or her own life as well as full responsibility for his or her actions. The book is written from the viewpoint that love is hard to achieve, but that the struggle is worth it.

Albee's approach to his theater audience parallels Fromm's approach to his readers. Like Fromm, Albee demands much of those who come to see his plays. His drama is neither escapist entertainment nor typical contemporary romantic comedy (that features a rosy love affair that is initiated, consummated, thwarted, and miraculously, eternally resolved in approximately two hours). As Anita Maria Stenz points out, active listening and involvement in the theatrical experience is required for the achievement of love outside the theater:

> Since Albee subtly develops the exposition of his plays right to the end, one is in fact required to listen very hard and to reconstruct for himself the background of the characters and their conflicts. Even though it may be painful, the playgoer is expected to participate fully in the theatrical experience, to concentrate critically upon each scene and, at the same time, to respond directly with his emotions. Wittingly, the author makes enormous demands on his audience (2).

Erich Fromm, like Edward Albee, does not promise an immediate improvement of one's "love life" for simply having read his work. The clarifications that both authors make of Man's current dilemmas and challenges and a more complete and complex knowledge of the way conditions "really are" make the two unique in their common approach and their potential for utility (as opposed to "passing interest") by those who study them.

The obstacles to love that both portray are stumbling blocks which inevitably lie before us all. Fromm and Albee share one ultimate goal: to help modern Man to help himself out of a self-induced "slumber" and into a state of meaningful, energetic, painful, promising participation in the process of life. Though Albee has readily admitted that the purpose of his drama is not to "give pat answers," the insight that his drama gives into the problems which routinely confront modern Man is, perhaps, an even more valuable contribution.[1] In a world of perplexing dilemmas and challenging moral, ethical, social, and other issues, Edward Albee does not provide the answers; he merely clarifies the questions.

Alienation and Modern Man's Need for Love

> I went to the zoo to find out more about the way people exist with animals, and the way animals exist with each other, and with people, too. It probably wasn't a fair test, what with everyone separated by bars from everyone else, the animals for the most part from each other, and always the people from the animals. But if it's a zoo, that's the way it is.
>
> --Jerry, Albee's The Zoo Story (Plays 1:48).

> The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is, indeed, the source of all anxiety.
>
> --E. Fromm, The Art of Loving (7).

During the 1950's and 1960's in America, psychologists and sociologists began to pay close attention to the growing phenomenon of alienation in twentieth-century Western society. In their 1962 book Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society, Eric and Mary Josephson report that the theme of alienation

> runs through the literature and drama of two continents; it can be traced in the content as well as the form of modern art; it preoccupies theolo-

> gians and philosophers, and to many psychologists and sociologists it is the central problem of our time (10).

It is this alienation that Fromm's The Art of Loving and virtually all of Albee's plays portray as one of modern Man's greatest fears and his biggest obstacle in attaining personal happiness. In 1955, Fromm defined the phenomenon in The Sane Society:

> By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of the world, as the creator of his own acts--but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship (111).

Albee's early one-acts--The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, and The Sandbox--feature alienated individuals as their main characters. In an article on The Zoo Story, Mary M. Nilan calls Jerry "a universal symbol of alienated modern man" (58). Lucina P. Gabbard points to "the theme of abandonment" in these three plays, observing that each "rings with rage at society's disregard for its outcasts" ("Triptych" 14). Gerald Weales notes that "Separateness is the operative word for Albee's characters" (30). In this later full-length plays, Albee consistently presents us with couples and their families who, despite the fact that they have shared the same house for years, are almost total strangers. Estranged from themselves and from one another, they are doomed to an existence "in which life is measured in terms of loss, love by its failure, contact by its absence" (Weales 29). The unnamed terror which creeps up and strikes Harry and Edna in A Delicate Balance is the stark realization that they are isolated, alienated individuals who are unable to face a life devoid of love. The physical presence of another human being is, by itself, not enough. Eventually these characters reach a point of

desperation--a moment when they suddenly become aware of their loneliness and feel trapped in a relationship that means nothing. In Tennessee Williams' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof, Maggie concisely explains this dilemma which stems from the disparity between the physical proximity and the emotional distance that exists in her relationship with her husband, Brick: "I'm not living with you," she tells her cold, distant roommate. "We occupy the same cage" (28).

Fromm summarizes the condition this way:

> Man--of all ages and cultures--is confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one's individual life and find at-onement (Art 8).

Fromm allows that there are other routes that one might take "to achieve union" besides love. These include three: orgiastic states, conformity, and creative activity (Art 9-15). These are considered by Fromm to be inferior solutions but he says they can be effective to a certain degree. These alternate routes are routinely used by unhappy characters in Albee's plays. Their unhappiness gives credence to Fromm's statements.

An orgiastic state is described as "a transitory state of exaltation [in which] the world outside disappears, and with it the feeling of separateness from it" (Art 9). Examples of this auto-induced state include the feelings one gets from using drugs or alcohol or during sexual orgasm. Fromm says that, since these states often involve the presence of another person (or group of people), the illusion that one is no longer a separate entity can also be strengthened (Art 9). Albee's characters can regularly be found in an orgiastic state. In Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? and A Delicate Balance, for example, the characters

spend a lot of time drinking. Much of their discussion centers around the type of liquor they drink, the methods they use for the preparation of drinks, the amounts they can drink, or some related topic. Each character drinks to extremes and none finds that the feeling which results is satisfying for very long. In Virginia Woolf, Martha engages in a "would-be" infidelity with Nick after a marathon-like night of drinking. From past experience, she is not surprised to find that neither sex nor liquor has changed the overall circumstances of her life. Her reflections as she fixes herself still another drink illustrate how inadequate the orgiastic state can be at making one forget one's pain:

> MARTHA: I cry allll the time; but deep inside, so no one can see me. I cry all the time. And Georgie cries all the time, too. We both cry all the time, and then, what we do, we cry, and we take our tears, and we put 'em in the ice box, in the goddamn ice trays (Begins to laugh) until they're all frozen (Laughs even more) and then . . . we put them . . . in our . . . drinks. (More laughter, which is something else, too. After a sobering silence) Up the drain, down the spout, dead, gone, and forgotten (185-6).

In The Zoo Story, Jerry describes the deadening effect that the search for the sexual orgasm has had on him:

> JERRY: I never see the little ladies more than once. I've never been able to have sex with, or, how is it put? . . . make love to anyone more than once. . . . Oh, I do love the little ladies; really, I love them. For about an hour (32-3).

In A Delicate Balance, Claire's sexual encounters with both Tobias (her sister's husband) and Harry (Tobias' "best friend") leave her feeling more alone than ever--a condition she fights unsuccessfully by drinking her way to alcoholism and self-loathing. The Mistress in All Over has spent the later years of her life as the companion of the Wife's husband. As he lies dying behind a screen, the Wife asks the Mistress what she

will do with the rest of her life when the Man is gone. "I don't know," she answers. "I've thought about it, of course, and nothing seems much good. I'm not a drinker, and I'm far too old for drugs" (All Over, Plays 3:100). Love is sadly out of consideration while our culture's favorite two "cure-alls"--booze and pills--top her list of alternate ways of life.

In The Zoo Story, Peter demonstrates a terminal case of Fromm's second alternative, conformity. As Lucina Gabbard has observed, "Albee shows Peter's conformity by his predictability" ("At the Zoo..." 368). Jerry chides Peter's tidy little existence because he is acutely aware that Peter's life is a sham and a refuge where he attempts to hide from the reality of his separateness. In A Delicate Balance, Claire (characteristically playing the "wise fool") quizzes Tobias about his dubious commitment to his "indistinguishiable if not necessarily similar friends," knowing that he has nothing in common with them besides a shared (and thinly concealed) feeling of loneliness and separation (19). As Fromm says, "While everyone tries to be as close as possible to the rest [of the herd], everyone remains utterly alone, pervaded by the deep sense of insecurity, anxiety and guilt which always results when human separateness cannot be overcome" (Art 72).

Creative activity commonly takes the form of "story-telling" in Albee's plays. Several of the stories rendered are, indeed, works of art, evoking strong emotion and illustrating that, more often than not, Albee's characters possess a deep sensitivity to the world outside themselves. At any rate, the stories are always accounts of the pain and emptiness that accompanies a loveless life. A partial list of these stories includes Jerry's tale of his trip to the zoo and his experiences with the dog at his rooming house; Martha's quiet, poignant rendition of "Our Son"; George's enigmatic "bergin" story; Tobias' insightful "The cat

that I had" speech; Claire's ridiculous account of her trip to buy a bathing suit in autumn; The Wife's reminiscent "The little girl I was when he came to me" story on how she met her husband; and Nancy's recollections of reading Proust as she considered cheating on her husband, Charlie, in Seascape. Each story, in its own way and to its own degree, demonstrates the passive approach Albee's characters have taken toward their problems. The past is re-lived time and time again in these well-thought-out, well-rehearsed recollections by people who have turned away from life and into themselves. While the stories show that the storytellers do, in fact, understand the nature of their separate dilemmas, too few of them apply their insight to an effort toward change. Their stories fail, in addition, to give them any relief since they do not have anyone with whom to share their tale who understands their plight. Too often, a story is an attempt to replace experience rather than to enhance it. In this sense, creativity is an ineffective at dealing with feelings of separateness as the orgiastic state and/or conformity. Fromm explains that the only true cure to loneliness is love:

> The full answer [to the problems that face us] lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in love. . . . The failure to achieve it means insanity or destruction--self-destruction or destruction of others. Without love, humanity could not exist for a day (Art 15).

Through this discussion of the recurrence of unsatisfying attempts to find happiness through alternatives to love, we have seen that, in the drama of Edward Albee, love is, indeed, the answer. Let us now examine the specific obstacles whch keep Albee's characters from finding love.

OBSTACLES TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF LOVE IN THE DRAMA OF EDWARD ALBEE

I. Chronic Passivity

> CHARLIE: I don't want to do . . . anything.
> --Seascape (Plays 3:8).

> Love is an activity; if I love, I am in a constant state of active concern with the loved person, but not only with him or her. For I shall become incapable of relating myself actively to the loved person if I am lazy, if I am not in constant state of awareness, alertness, activity.
> --Erich Fromm, (Art 107).

As I have just noted in the Introduction, Edward Albee and Erich Fromm both require an active participation in the process of life by those who study their works. This requirement is a direct reaction against the state of auto-induced passivity in which both believe modern Man currently operates. Pursuit of a better life implies activity; modern Man fails to attain happiness because there is, by definition, no such thing as a "passive pursuit." An aggressive approach to life is the first step toward the achievement of love (or any goal). As Albee has noted, "I find that anything less than absolutely full, dangerous participation is an absolute waste of some rather valuable time" (Roudane 16).

Though participation can be potentially "dangerous," it is the perils of being passive that Albee regularly dramatizes. The most extreme example of this is All Over wherein passivity is practiced to a point where it is analogous to a "death-in-life" state. The characters in the play are each in the process of waiting for a formal, literal death to overtake their current figurative one. The play is essentially a long conversation about mortality and dying. As a man lies dying behind a screen, his Wife, Daughter, Son, Best Friend, and Mistress contemplate the emptiness

of their lives and their own nearness to death. Though the play ends with the death of the man and the line "All over," "The irony in this play is," as Robbie Odom Moses has accurately observed, "that there is more life in the dead man than in the survivors" (76).

The Wife, for instance, explains to the others that she believes her life without her husband will probably be much like life with him alive. She says she has been "practicing widowhood" for the many years that have passed since the time he abandoned her to pursue a relationship with the Mistress (101). The Wife tells the group that she has made "a lot of adjustments over the years, if only to avoid being eaten away" (101). Rather than attack her problems (which would require thought, action, and pain) she simply shifts gears and coasts her way downhill into a figurative death. As she sits helpless while her husband is dying, she (like the others) mulls over her own approaching death and realizes that her end will soon come--after many years of lost, untried beginnings. Albee himself points out that "The people in this play [All Over] have not lived their lives; that's what they're screaming and crying about" (Vos 81). There is no love in this family during their "hour of need." Love is talked out but it is not felt. It is a foreign concept to these people who have never actively sought it--or anything else. Their approach has been retreat, not pursuit. Each has lived voluntarily in the shadow of the man, and his imminent death startles them into a new understanding: they are virtually ghosts from the past of a man whom they never knew--or tried to know. As John Mac Nicholas has insightfully observed, "All Over strongly implies that the opposite of love is not hate but dying" (19).

Albee's other plays may be more subtle in their attacks on complacency, but the urgency of the message to "Live your life" is no less important.

In Seascape, for example, a couple in their fifties (Charlie and Nancy) relax on the beach after a picnic lunch. Their conversation turns to events past and the challenges of the future, revealing Nancy to be a bright, animated, loving wife and Charlie a sensitive, contented, tired husband. Looking with optimism toward the future, Nancy suggests several alternatives for their future together, but Charlie's only desire is to sit around and do nothing. "We've earned a little rest" from life, he tells her (10). Nancy is perturbed: "We've earned a little life, if you ask me" (37). She is irritated by Charlie's past-orienation and she flatly refuses to let him become a "vegetable." Nancy loves her husband too much to allow him to "die" any sooner than the minute his pulse stops. Because of Nancy's prodding and loving encouragement, Charlie is able to "wake up" and his search for more life and more love continues.

Albee's characters utilize a variety of defense mechanisms in their "effort" to passively deny their problems. Accommodation, avoidance, denial, and maintenance are among the methods they adopt to put off dealing with reality. Each of these methods is highly effective for misdirecting one's attention away from one's problems temporarily, but sooner or later their illusory world is destroyed and, in the meantime, their quest for love is sidetracked for abandoned.

Gerald Weales has noted the dependence of many of Albee's characters on accommodation--a mechanism which, he reminds us, is "a way of coping instead of a way of life" (32). George and Martha thrive on the accommodations they've made for one another--but their tone when discussing them is one of self-pity and bitterness, not loving sacrifice. George and Nick discuss their mutual unhappiness in marriage and Nick reveals

the circumstances which forced him to marry Honey. Nick admits that there were compensating factors involved--Honey's father left her money--and George tells him "There are always compensating factors"--factors which are meant to replace love (Virginia Woolf 103). Later, George sums up the tools he has used to deal with his own marital problems: "Accommodation, malleability, adjustment . . . those seem to be in the order of things, don't they?" (101-2). While George is commendable for admitting his failure to deal with difficulties, he is also to be criticized for failing to apply his insight into his shortcomings to a course directed at correcting them. Martha explains her compromised way of thinking about her marriage this way:

> You can go along . . . forever, and everything's manageable. You make all sorts of excuses to yourself . . . you know . . . this is life . . . the hell with it . . . maybe tomorrow he'll be dead . . . maybe tomorrow you'll be dead . . . all sorts of excuses (156-7).

The pursuit for ever-new excuses and rationalizations for why her marriage is a failure keep Martha from grabbing the truth by the throat and conquering it. George's death would not solve Martha's problems. She and George are both already "dead," and such a figurative death has not served as a release but, instead, as an obstacle. Though the couple has successfully "sifted" out the reality of their relationship, Albee shows that such an avoidance of the truth can only go on for so long. Inevitably in Albee's plays (and, in life) the whole illusion goes "Snap!" and no love can ever be found amidst the rubble.

In The Zoo Story, Peter avoids his problems by retreating to a bench in a secluded part of Central Park to lose himself in his reading. He is "intent on maintaining a mellow detachment from life," and the painful reality of his aloneness escapes him--at least, for a time

(Hirsch 5). Anita M. Stenz describes Peter's existence this way:

> Thoroughly insulated against anything that can remind him that there is something missing in his life--contact and intense involvement with other human beings--Peter may as well be dead (129).

As in many of Albee's plays, the truth eventually intrudes--in this case, in the form of Jerry--and destroys Peter's protective shell. Once again, death conquers love because dying requires less effort than loving.

A Delicate Balance is a vision of emptiness. The play contains numerous incidents of chronic passivity and denial of life. Selective amnesia is one form of such passivity:

> TOBIAS (Pleading a little) When will it all . . . just go in the past . . . forget itself.
>
> CLAIRE: When all the defeats are done, admitted. When memory takes over and corrects fact . . . makes it tolerable (22).

Tobias tries desperately to deny or forget the problems that he refuses to deal with for fear of pain. His wife, Agnes the martyr (or, at least, one of the martyrs among many in the play) has stopped trying to improve her lot in life and has take to simple "maintenance":

> Maintenance. When we keep something in shape, we maintain its shape--whether we are proud of that shape or not, is another matter--we keep it from falling apart. We do not attempt the impossible. We maintain. We hold (80).

Tobias' household has entered a state of mental and spiritual lethargy. Autumn has arrived and with it, the premature shadow of winter and death. Somehow, though, Agnes and Tobias will probably seem strangely unaffected by physical death when it actually arrives since they, like the Wife in All Over, have been rehearsing for its arrival for so long. Death will, no doubt, come and go unnoticed.

A general pattern of "quitting"--abandoning the quest for love to

settle into a life without struggle--leaves Albee's characters unable to grow as individuals or to enhance their empty lives in any meaningful way. While love may, in fact, be able to "heal all wounds," it cannot thrive under conditions counter to life itself. Passive patterns such as accommodation and denial are merely methods of self-deception and self-destruction. "We submerge our truths and have our sunsets on untroubled waters," explains Claire but, in saying so, she shows that she is consciously aware of her one dishonesty with herself. The failure of Albee's characters to find love is tragic because most (like Claire) clearly see the reasons why love is impossible. Their powers to change their lives are weak from lack of use. Claire (and those like her who see the truth and attempt to work around it) will eventually be sucked under the "untroubled waters" and drowned in a sea of self-pity and self-imposed "sleep" while a life-saver labelled "love" floats quietly by. As Fromm has explained:

> The capacity to love demands a state of intensity, awakeness, enhanced vitality, which can only be the result of a productive and active orientation in many other spheres of life. If one is not productive in other spheres, one is not productive in love either (Art 108).

The obstacle of chronic passivity does not only keep the characters in Albee's plays from being "in love," it keeps them from being "alive"; and, as the plays regularly demonstrate, love and death are simply incompatible.

II. Personal Immaturity

> GEORGE: Vicious children, with their oh-so-sad games, hopscotching their way through life, etcetera, etcetera (Woolf 197).
>
> MARTHA (A sleepy child): No more games . . . please. It's games I don't want (207).
>
> The ability to love as an act of giving depends on the character development of the person . . . the person has to overcome dependency, narcissistic omnipotence, the wish to exploit others, or to hoard, has acquired [sic] faith in his own person, courage to rely on his powers in the attainment of his goals. To the degree that these qualities are lacking, he is afraid of giving of himself--hence of loving (Art 21-2).

Several critics have noted that Albee's characters frequently exhibit a variety of childish behaviors.[2] Brattiness, petty jealousy, temper tantrums, possessiveness, and other forms of infantile behavior routinely crop up during an Albee play--especially at moments of intense conflict. Albee's characters are, indeed, "emotional infants"--adults who display the emotional temperament of a five-year-old child. As such, their capacity to handle love (or any mature emotion) is severely limited.

Fromm differentiates the normal adult orientation of love from that of a child by explaining that "love is primarily giving, not receiving," for an adult (Art 18). For a small child, however, love is a channel through which one ordinarily receives without actively giving:

> For most children before the age from eight and a half to ten, the problem is exclusively that of being loved . . . for what one is. The child up to this age does not yet love, he responds gratefully, joyfully to being loved. At this point of the child's development a new factor enters into the picture: that of a new feeling of producing love by one's own activity (Art 33).

It would appear that many of Albee's characters never get beyond an emotional age of between eight and ten. They not only act like first

and second graders, their discussion and comments about love show that, for them, the problem of love is strictly one of being loved--not loving anyone else.

First, let us look at some instances of childish behavior in the plays. In The Zoo Story, Peter screams "I'M A GROWN-UP" (55). This announcement is in contradiction to the behavior Peter exhibits. His behavior--an, at times, embarrassing display of childish ignorance and naivete--does not become Peter, a publishing executive in his thirties who has two children of his own. Nevertheless, like a child, he is completely unequipped to handle Jerry's story of his struggle with the complexities of life and love. "Why did you tell me all of this?" he pathetically asks Jerry (44). Like a small child who runs to his bedroom to hide from something scary on television, he reacts against hearing about the unpleasant side of life. Later in the play, when Jerry attempts to "steal" Peter's bench, he childishly screams "MY BENCH!" (32). The two of them appear like playground brats who can't get along.

Throughout the play, Jerry acts the part of neglected child while Peter resembles the fumbling father who has no concept of how to deal with an insistent child. Jerry's initial announcement, "MISTER, I'VE BEEN TO THE ZOO!" demonstrates his own childishness (17). Having called Peter "mister," he uses the first of several attention-getters to keep Peter's focus on what he has to say. Jerry desperately wants attention and he uses the tactics of a child to get it. The first few exchanges between the two are prompted by a series of insults by Jerry of Peter to goad him into responding. When Peter decides to leave his bench (and Jerry's insults), Jerry attempts to make it up to him by tickling him (47). These behaviors by Jerry show that he uses immature methods

in his attempts to attain what he desires.

Examples of childish behavior abound in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? The opening moments of the play between George and Martha establish a pattern of sometimes comic, occassionally vicious childishness and game-playing that is repeated over and over throughout the play. Martha starts the game by taunting George and by calling him names ("What a cluck you are")(3). Then, she makes an announcement that she knows he won't approve of ("We've got guests")(8). George sulks and whines like an ornery boy who needs a nap ("I wish you'd tell me something sometime. . . I wish you'd stop springing things on me all the time") and Martha tries to humor him into playing the game with her (by singing "Who's afraid of Virginia Woolf?")(11:12). When George doesn't respond, Martha's feelings are hurt and she becomes angry ("You make me puke!)(13). Now she plays the pouting child ("Why don't you want to kiss me?") while he takes the role of parent (i.e., warning her to be on her best behavior in front of their "company": "Just don't start in on the bit about the kid")(15:18). All through the remainder of the play the two alternate playing the roles of parent one minute and child the next (i.e. near the end of the play George plays the father-figure when he soothingly orders Nick and Honey "Home to bed, children; it's way past your bedtime"--this after spending the previous several hours belittling them and calling Honey such things as "angel-tits" or "monkey-nipples")(129:131). At best, George and Martha can only "play 'grown-up.'" At worst, they both deserve a good, hard spanking.

Honey plays an interesting part in Albee's study of childishness in Virginia Woolf. She, like Peter, is irritatingly ignorant and naive. Her methods of dealing with difficulty demonstrate her immaturity: throwing

up, avoiding her problems ("I don't want to know anything"), or using selective amnesia ("I've decided I don't remember anything")(178:211). George and Martha may have fits of immaturity, but they are slightly more admirable than Honey because their childishness is a periodic condition of which they are both aware. Honey lives in a state of social, emotional, and psychological infancy unmindful of her condition. Honey has avoided any life situation that might prove painful or dangerous. The result has been an avoidance of life itself.

Anthony C. Hilfer has noted one other effect of childish behavior on the characters in this particular play. He observes that childishness is one factor that leads to the development of a sado-masochistic relationship. Albee's portrayal of George and Martha's marriage certainly demonstrates these elements:

> Martha plays a dominant, masculine, sadistic role, whereas George is subordinate, passive, masochistic. Now as William Stekel, the author of the well-known treatise Sadism and Masochism, has pointed out, the behavior of sado-masochists exhibits a strong element of the childish. The sickness of the sado-masochist is essentially a regression to childishness. Albee's characters, perfectly fitting this pattern, are all children and very naughty ones at that (123).

Fromm refers to sado-masochism as one of the "immature forms of love" (Art 15). In sadism, he says, "The sadistic person wants to escape from his aloneness and his sense of imprisonment by making another person part and parcel of himself (Art 16-17). Of the masochistic person, Fromm says he "escapes from the unbearable feeling of isolation . . . by making himself part and parcel of another person who directs him, guides him, protects him . . ." (Art 16). The following exchange illustrates these tendencies in George and Martha:

GEORGE: (Barely contained anger now) You can sit

there in that chair of yours, you can sit there with the gin running out of your mouth, and you can humiliate me, you can tear me apart . . . ALL NIGHT . . . and that's perfectly all right . . . that's O.K. . . .

MARTHA: YOU CAN STAND IT!

GEORGE: I CANNOT STAND IT!

MARTHA: YOU CAN STAND IT!! YOU MARRIED ME FOR IT!!

(A silence)

GEORGE: (Quietly) That is a desperately sick lie.

MARTHA: DON'T YOU KNOW IT, EVEN YET?

GEORGE: (Shaking his head) Oh . . . Martha.

MARTHA: My arm has gotten tired whipping you (Woolf 152-3).

It is a lack of personal character development which leads George and Martha to revert to an immature form of love. For while they are too childish to handle mature love, both are human beings who genuinely need each other. Sidney Finkelstein has described the problem this way:

> Their [George and Martha's] bickering does not come out of the realization that they have made a "bad marriage," and that either has found a more satisfying relationship or "true love" elsewhere. They are emotionally bound to one another, they fit together, and yet the marriage has not grown because they have not grown as people. Out of the awareness of this lack in themselves they attack each other so savagely, though knowing that the counter-thrusts are also true and will strike home (237).

Claire in A Delicate Balance is the resident "child" at Tobias' household until 36-year old daughter Julia returns demanding her room after her most recent marriage has gone bad. "Are you home forever, back from the world?" asks Claire, "To the sadness and reassurance of your parents? Have you come to take my place?" (92). Julia is enraged to find that the room she considers to be hers is "full of Harry and Edna" (54). Like Peter defending his bench, Julia wants possession of her "property"; but Harry and Edna have beaten her to it. "What . . . what do they want?" she ironically asks Claire (91). "Succor.

. . . Comfort. . . . Warmth. . . . A special room with a night light, or the door ajar so you can look down the hall and see that Mommy's door is open," Claire tells her (91-2). Like Julia, Claire is very much "a misunderstood little girl" (as George calls Martha in Virginia Woolf) who, like Jerry craves attention (224). She generally goes about getting the attention of her sister, Agnes, through methods identical to Jerry's: she insults Agnes, balances a brandy glass on her forehead to infuriate Agnes, and sweeps into the room with an accordion around her neck to make her presence known with noise. Claire and Julia both need "looking after," and, left unguarded, they can get into big trouble much like a couple of toddlers playing under the sink.

The Daughter in All Over is almost identical to Julia except she is more spiteful, more shrill. There is a bitter hatred between her and her mother which is dramatically demonstrated by an exchange of slaps across the face by the two near the beginning of the play after the two have hurt each other with their words. The only contact the two make at this mournful time is a slap that is hard enough to make the point but not forceful enough to wake the two from their state of "sleep." "Does anyone love me?" demands Daughter at the end of the first act (51). When she doesn't get the answer she wants, she goes downstairs to let reporters and photographers converge on the family in the bedroom of the dying man. When her mother insinutates that she enjoys the pain that her husband (who abuses her physically) has inflicted on her, the Daughter's response gives insight into her vindictive, childish nature:

> THE DAUGHTER: I'm not your usual masochist, in spite of what she [referring to her mother] thinks. I mean, a broken rib really hurts, and everybody knws what a black eye on a lady means. I don't

> fancy any of that, but I do care an awful lot about the guilt I can produce in those that do the hurting (All Over 62).

Like Jerry, Claire, Julia, and others, the Daughter will accept attention in any form that it happens to come. Love is what each actually needs, of course, but none knows how to go about getting it. Because each is fixated in the infantile stage of waiting to be loved, none is able to achieve the love each seeks. Each believes that he or she is "entitled" to love, just as each "has rights to" some physical piece of property. As Fromm says, "Infantile love follows the principle: "I love because I am loved." Mature love follows the principle: "I am loved because I love"" (Art 34). While each character waits for love to come without ever giving it, the cyclical dilemma continues; each grows older physically while he or she seems to regress further emotionally. "Time happens," as Agnes says, and love never comes (Balance 164).

In the first two sections, we have seen how Albee's characters let love slip by due to passivity or immaturity. In the next section, we will examine characters who are more aggressive in their quest for love but who are routinely thwarted by the fact that they don't know exactly what they are looking for.

III. The Failure of Parental Love

> THE WIFE: What is it if you kill your daughter? It's matricide if she kills you, and infanticide if you do her in when she's a tot, but what if she's all grown up and beginning to wrinkle? Justifiable homicide, I suppose (All Over 95).
>
> THE DAUGHTER [To THE WIFE]: You make me as sick as I make you (All Over 83).
>
> There are many people who have never seen a loving person. . . . While we teach knowledge [in our educational system], we are losing that teaching which is the most important one for human development: the teaching which can only be given by the presence of a mature, loving person (Art 98).

Thus far we have noted the negative personality traits which Albee's characters routinely possess and how such flaws stand in the way of the attainment of love. We have found that, typically, the characters can be described by using at least one of the following adjectives: dull, lazy, complacent, insecure, insensitive, hypersensitive, self-deceiving, petty, foul-mouthed, rude, drunk, ignorant, weak, or wasteful. No matter which you choose, of course, you end up with an unsympathetic character. If such is the case, then why do Albee's characters consistently evoke the sympathy (and even empathy) of the audience?

The fact is that most of Albee's characters are not entirely to blame for their personal shortcomings. If they are less than perfect, less than lovable, less than loving, it is because they are the products of a self-perpetuating cycle created by and consisting of unloved, unloving parents who produce unloved, unloving children who, in turn, grow up to become unloving parents, etc. As Fromm has stated, "Love is a power which produces love; impotence is the inability to produce love" (Art 21). The drama of Edward Albee is full of impotent parents whose prospects of ever producing anything more than impotent children

and grandchildren are very limited.

This section will examine the failure of parental love in Albee's plays. Specifically, I will discuss such issues as the importance of parental love, the ramifications of failed parental love, and the psychological reasons which lie behind the failure of parental love. As we shall see, Albee almost always includes exposition on the childhood of his main character, and this information is often a key to the understanding of that individual's actions. The care that goes into the dramatizations of failed parental love shows that Albee has a clear understanding of the scope and seriousness of the problem as well as a belief that such a failure has long-term and often irreversible and irreparable effects on more than just one individual.

Let us first look at Erich Fromm's definition of the "ideal types" of both "motherly" and "fatherly" love. Motherly love means

> I am loved for what I am, or perhaps more accurately, I am loved because I am. This experience of being loved by mother is a passive one. There is nothing I have to do in order to be loved--mother's love is unconditional. All I have to do is to be--to be her child (Art 33).

> Fatherly love is conditonal love. Its principle is "I love you because you fulfill my expectations, because you do your duty, because you are like me" (Art 36).

Fromm emphasizes that both kinds of love have their negative aspects:

> There is a negative side . . . to the unconditional quality of mother's love. Not only does it not need to be deserved--it also cannot be acquired, produced, controlled. If it is there, it is like a blessing; if it is not there, it is as if all beauty had gone out of life--and there is nothing I can do to create it (Art 33).

The negative aspect of fatherly love, says Fromm, is that it has to be earned and can, therefore, be lost (Art 36).

According to Fromm, every child ideally follows a progression from motherly love (which makes him feel worthwhile, good, lovable) to a feeling of security and a need to produce love to make others happy, pleased, proud (fatherly love). "Eventually," concludes Fromm, "the mature person has [to] come to the point where he is his own mother and his own father" (Art 37).

In Albee's plays, it is not unusual to find characters who have not developed a sense of self-worth and security because they have not been loved (either by mother or father or both) during their childhood years. As adults, they are doomed to a loveless life since they have never known unconditional love nor love for one's accomplishments; and, consequently, they lack the understanding or ability to love anyone else. Unable to break out of the cycle, they expend their energies on attempts to find "surrogate parents" who will give them the love that they failed to receive from their real parents. The characters either repeat the mistakes of their parents (without learning from their mistakes) or engage in some destructive relationship which they feel forced to accept in place of love. Though they are almost always aware that they are not involved in a relationship of love, they also believe that a destructive relationship is better than no relationship at all. What Albee's characters fear more than anything else is to be treated with total indifference. For them it is better to be hated than to be ignored.

To understand the desperate dilemma that leads Jerry to Peter's bench (and subsequently, to suicide), one need only look at the information Albee supplies about Jerry's home life:

> good old Mom walked out on good old Pop when I was ten and a half years old; she embarked on an adulterous turn of our southern states . . . a journey of a year's duration . . . and her most

> constant companion . . . among others, among many others . . . was a Mr. Barleycorn. At least, that's what good old Pop told me after he went down . . . came back . . . brought her body north. We'd received the news between Christmas and New Year's, you see, that good old Mom had parted with the ghost in some dump in Alabama. . . . At any rate, good old Pop celebrated the New Year for an even two weeks and then slapped into the front of a somewhat moving city omnibus, which sort of cleaned things out family-wise (Zoo Story 31).

The emotional scars that Jerry bears as a result of a lack of parental love have left him with, among other things, a lack of "love for life." Without any love from his mother, Jerry's sense of self-worth is non-existent. He has not learned how to be happy or to love his own life, and this allows (if not prompts) him to kill himself when he is rejected by both his parents, the dog, Peter, and, undoubtedly, many others. After telling Peter the sad details of his "orphaned" status as a child, he adds, "But that was a long time ago, and I have no feeling about any of it that I care to admit to myself" (32). Still, the effects of the past linger and Jerry is simply unable to overcome odds which, through no fault of his own, are overwhelmingly stacked against him. They cyclical nature of failed parental love is evident in Jerry's remarks about his sexual encounters with "the little ladies," which we have already discussed. A repetition of his mother's search for union through the sexual orgasm (though, in Jerry's case, the search was conducted in the name of love), leaves him victimized and more hopeless and despondent than ever. As Nevlin Vos has stated, "in the relationship of parents and children, Albee portrays the lack of love which leads to death" (83). Jerry's suicide in Central Park is the most graphic illustration of a syndrome of inherited self-hatred, fear, and disgust with life that runs through many of Albee's plays.

In A Delicate Balance, Agnes refers to her "poor parents, in their separate heavens" (56). From such a statement, we can infer that her present relationship with Tobias probably parallels the marital arrangement of her parents when they were alive. Tobias and Agnes are virtually strangers, talking around the issues and never really getting at the real conflicts which separate them from happiness and from one another. Tobias is passive, quiet, and agreeable while Agnes is analytical, outspoken, and self-righteous. The couple's relationship is based on an ongoing cooperation and an acceptance of one another's faults (while each blissfully ignores his or her own shortcomings). Agnes keeps the balance from tipping by maintaining decorum and an artificial "order" in a household whose inhabitants need to air their grievances once and for all and then work actively toward finding a permanent solution to their problems. Resentment and rebellion bubble dangerously just beneath the surface of their marriage, and the veneer of control is marred by scratches of anger and hatred. While Agnes perpetuates the problems of her parents by keeping herself isolated from her family, she affects all those around her in a negative way--especially Julia.

After the failure of her fourth marriage, Julia returns home to a place where she is not wanted. Tobias is typically clueless as he discovers that his daughter is returning home, while Agnes is, at best, ambivalent about her daughter's arrival. The following exchange shows that, although Agnes feels obligated to help Julia, her obvious irritation at the inconvenience of Julia's homecoming makes it clear that she is lacking in motherly love:

> AGNES: Tobias, you will be unhappy to know it,
> I suppose, or of mixed emotions, certainly, but
> Julia is coming home. . . . She is leaving Douglas,
> which is no surprise to me.

> TOBIAS: But, wasn't Julia happy? You didn't tell me anything about . . . .
>
> AGNES: If Julia were happy, she would not be coming home. I don't want her here, God knows. I mean she's welcome, of course . . . . . it is her home, we are her parents, the two of us, and we have our obligations to her, and I have reached an age, Tobias, when I wish we were always alone, you and I, without . . . hangers-on . . . or anyone (Balance 30-1).

Agnes knows that Julia will bring chaos and disorder into her stringent household and she does not want to deal with it. When Julia attempts to talk out her problems with her parents (an act which would no doubt benefit her greatly), she is shut off by her mother, who tells her "You needn't make a circus out of it" (75). The perspective that Julia might well have gained from such a discussion is lost. Julia continues to be misunderstood and unhappy while Agnes is torn between meeting her obligation to a daughter whom she is unable to love and maintaining order in an attempt to compensate for the absence of love.

Julia's regularly scheduled bad marriages are a direct result of the way she was brought up. In a house where order, peace, and quiet reigned supreme, Julia grew up with litle or no insight into the true feelings of her parents. Fromm explains the effects of this kind of

> neurotic disturbance in love which is based on a different kind of parental situation, occurring when parents do not love each other, but are too restrained to quarrel or indicate any signs of dissatisfaction outwardly. At the same time, remoteness makes them also unspontaneous in their relationship to their children. What a little girl experiences is an atmosphere of "correctness," but one which never permits a close contact with either father or mother, and hence leaves the girl puzzled and afraid. She is never sure of what the parents feel or think; there is always an element of the unknown, the mysterious, in the atmosphere (Art 82-3).

Desperate for feedback (and a subsequent end to the "not-knowing"), Julia rushes into one marriage after the other. In an attempt to achieve some

outside response (even if it is consistently negative) and to escape from her unloving parents, Julia marries men whom she doesn't love. She says she left her latest husband, Doug, because he is "against everything!" (Balance 74). His outspokeness is, nonetheless, probably the very thing about him that initially attracted her. Julia tells Tobias that, when she was a child, she viewed him as a "very nice but ineffectual, essential, but not-really-thought-of, gray . . . noneminence" (63-4). Her latest marriage was, perhaps, a rebellion against such terminal agreeability. Julia does not know what love really is; however, she is certain that her parents' marriage is a loveless one. She consequently strives for the exact opposite. Fromm explains that growing up in an unemotional atmosphere of imposed order can lead a girl to believe that masochistic tendencies are "the only way to experience intense excitement":

> Often such women would prefer having the husband make a scene and shout, to his maintaining a more normal and sensible behavior, because at least it would take away the burden of tension and fear from them; not so rarely they unconsciously provoke such behavior, in order to end the tormenting suspense of affective neutrality (Art 83).

Since Julia has never witnessed a loving relationship and she, herself, has never felt loved by her parents, she is an alien to the ways of love. Though one can be sympathetic to Agnes' annoyance with Julia's perennial bad marriages, it is also hard to hold Julia exclusively responsible for being completely unfamiliar with a subject that is so totally foreign to her. If love is, in fact, "a power which produces love," then Julia cannot be expected to produce a product when she has no access to the necessary raw materials, no concept of the assembly process, and no idea of what the finished product ought to be like.

As previously noted, the Daughter in All Over is very much like Julia.

In studying the Daughter's relationship with her parents, further similarities can be seen in the childhood circumstances of the two. The Daughter's parents were separated after thirty years of marriage, when her father abandoned his family to be with the Mistress. The Wife was left behind with the Son, the Daughter, and feelings of intense bitterness, anxiety, and guilt since she privately wondered if she was somehow responsible for driving her husband away. The anger and resentment that she felt was taken out on the two children. Son and Daughter grew up in a house where the mother projected her self-hatred on to her children and where the father was more of a symbol than a real person. Son and Daughter were little more than props around the house which their father visited at Christmas (or whenever he felt obligated). Together, the Wife, Son, and Daughter lost their own identities and defined their individual existences only in terms of their relationship to the absent father/husband.

Julia and the Son and Daughter experienced similar childhoods. The Wife, like Agnes, was "ruler of the roost"--a position she gained by default, not choice. Both Tobias and the Man are background figures in their own homes: Tobias because he is too passive, and the Man because he is too busy being successful in the outside world. Thirty years after he married the Wife, the Man abandoned her. In the meantime, the Wife was left to analyze her loss and to punish her children for what she considered to be her own inadequacies. Because her identity was so contingent on the presence of her husband, the Wife did not feel secure enough to pursue a relationship with anyone else (including the Best Friend with whom she had a brief affair). Her inability to give her children the motherly love they needed caused them to grow up hating

themselves and life, itself. The Son feels hopelessly inadequate and the Daughter settles for a self-destructive marriage because she feels unworthy of love but in need of attention. In All Over, Albee thus successfully illustrates how "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children."

The relationship between the Wife and the Man is significant because it is the clearest example of the form of "pseudo-love" on which all of the family relationships are based--what Fromm calls "idolatrous love":

> If a person has not reached the level when he has a sense of identity, of I-ness rooted in the productive unfolding of his powers, he tends to "idolize" the loved person. . . . In the process he deprives himelf of all sense of strength, loses himself in the loved one instead of finding himself (Art 83).

The Wife's comments about her husband would seem to indicate that she idolizes him. Throughout the play, she repeats the "title" of a story which keeps popping into her head--"The little girl I was when he came to me"--an account of how she fell in love with her husband. The audience is given the strong impression that she fell in love with an image rather than a man. She tells the Mistress that she was waiting "For Prince Charming!" when

> he came along, done with the university, missing the war in France, twenty-four, already started on his fortune--just begun, but straight ahead, and clear. We met at my rich uncle's house, where he had come to discuss a proposition, and he made me feel twelve again, or younger, and . . . comfortable, as if he were an older brother, though . . . different; very different. I had never felt threatened by boys, but he was a man, and I felt secure (All Over 104).

It was an image of security that most attracted the Wife to the Man, and he did provide her with a sense of security temporarily. Unfor-

tunately, security cannot come about by merely being in the presence of someone who is secure. The Wife has failed to develop a sense of personal security first and will, thus, never be secure in her relationships with anyone else. She tells the Best Friend that by divorcing his wife he abandoned and consequently "murdered" her (All Over 32). "There was no killing there," says the Best Friend, and the Wife answers, "Just . . . divorce" (32). This plainly shows that the Wife believes that abandonment--whether it is physical or emotional--is equal to murder, yet she does not see that the resulting "death" is a self-imposed, avoidable one. She fails to realize that her own emotional abandonment of her children is much closer to murder in the sense that as their mother she in in a unique position to give them the security and love they will need to be productive in life. Instead she ridicules them calling them "failures" and perpetuating the loveless cycle:

> THE WIFE [To THE SON]: Well . . . I can't expect you to be the son of your father and be much: it's too great a burden; but to be so little is . . . (Dismissing him with a gesture, paces a little) [To THE SON and THE DAUGHTER] You've neither of you had children, thank God, children that I've known of. (Harsh) I hope you never marry . . . either of you! (Softer, if no gentler) Let the line end where it is . . . at its zenith (80).

The Wife fails to see that at this point her family has actually hit rock bottom, and each is too thoroughly ignorant of the ways of love to rise up and conquer separateness and hatred.

Martha's failure to attain the love of her parents is the key to understanding the puzzling problems in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Specifically, Martha's personal unhappiness, her subconscious feelings of failure as a daughter and as a wife (which she projects on to George), her intense desire for a child and her subsequent creation of an imagi-

nary "son," and her inability to love herself (or anyone else) are all direct results of the failure of parental love. The causes and effects of Martha's loveless childhood are so complex and so complicated that a very lengthy analysis would be required to fully examine them. For the purpose of the present study, however, I will summarize the causes and effect of failed parental love as they are dramatized in the play.

Martha's mother died when she was very young, depriving her of motherly love. Her father subsequently married a rich, older woman who soon died, leaving him with the money and status he needed to become the president of the college where he taught. Martha was sent away to a boarding school where she would be out of her father's way. Deprived of a mother and detached from her father (who was and is devoted only to his college), Martha grew up alone--without any demonstrable parental attention or love. She did not blame her father for leaving her, but she did come to subconsciously think of herself as unlovable as a result of her abandonment. The less she loved herself, it seems, the more she told herself how much she loved her father. Her description of him to Nick and Honey shows her feelings of pride in him;

> MARTHA: Mommy dies early, see, and I sort of grew up with Daddy. (Pause--thinks) . . . I went away to school and stuff, but I more or less grew up with him. Jesus, I admired that guy! I worshipped him . . I absolutely worshipped him. I still do. And he was pretty fond of me, too . . . you know? We had a real . . . rapport going . . . a real rapport (Woolf 77).

Even in this speech, Martha gives clues that, at least on the subconscious level, she realizes that Daddy shipped her off to school to be rid of her. George confirms this later in the play, of course, when he tells his guests that Martha's father is a man "who doesn't give a damn whether she lives or dies, who couldn't care less what happens to his only

daughter" (Woolf 225). Martha says she established "a real rapport" with her father, but such a relationship could hardly replace one of true fatherly love. Like the Wife in All Over, Martha idolizes her father since she has no identity outside of her relationship to him and to George (whom she considers "a flop")(189). She tries two routes in her constant effort to please her father (and, ideally, to be granted fatherly love and approval): she attempts to be successful (in other words, to marry an ambitious, intelligent, personable professor who will ultimately take over as college president) and she tries to become a mother (thus providing Daddy with a grandson who would make right all her wrongs as a daughter as well as all her husband's inadequacies as a son-in-law and faculty member). When it becomes apparent to her that she will not be successful at either of these routes, Martha projects her subconscious feelings of resentment and her feelings of failure on to George. She wants to turn her husband into a copy of her father for two reasons: (1) so she can receive from him the fatherly love that she missed during her childhood, and (2) so she can vent the anger that she harbors from her loveless childhood on to George, her surrogate father, since she is afraid to yell at her real father, the true source of her resentment and anger. Fromm explains Martha's neurotic relationship with George when he points out that

> The basic condition for neurotic love lies in the fact that one or both of the "lovers" have remained attached to the figure of a parent, and transfer feelings, expectations and fears one once had toward father or mother to the loved person in adult life (Art 79).

Having received no feedback from her father as she grew up (aside from his utter disapproval of her first marriage), Martha now looks to George for constant affirmation and approval. On the subconscious level,

she wants him to be the father she never had, but George simply does not want the responsibility of such a role. George is, furthermore, unable to instill in Martha the security that she needs since he is at least as insecure as she is. Together, by creating an imaginary "son," the two unite to attempt to defend themselves against the insecurity and impotence that they both have been made to feel. But Fromm sees this type of desire for a child as a form of projection--the projection of one's own problems on to the children:

> First of all such projection takes place not infrequently in the wish for children. In such cases the wish for children is primarily determined by projecting one's own problems of existence on that of the children. When a person feels that he has not been able to make sense of his own life, he tries to make sense of it in terms of the life of his children (Art 85).

In George and Martha's case, however, the child only causes further conflict and insecurity. For "he" does not really exist, and yet Martha's desire to have a son is so intense that she has trouble keeping reality separate from illusion. Her rendition of "Our Son" demonstrates that the child does not solve the problems of his parents; instead, he inherits them. For instance, when Martha describes the boy's room and "the bow and arrow he kept under his bed . . .," George asks her "Why? Why, Martha?" and she replies, "for fear . . . for fear of . . . ." George emphasizes her response by adding "For fear. Just that: for fear" (Woolf 219). Rather than banishing the fear in their lives, George and Martha's "son" repeats it in his own life. The two have not improved their lives by having a child but, instead, have passed their unhappiness on to still another individual.

Eventually the child is used not as a refuge but as a weapon for the couple to use against one another. The imaginary son soon becomes one

more in a set of "bean bags" that the couple tosses back and forth at one another in times of mutual self-hatred and shame. As Fromm tells us, when one projects one's own problems on to the child

> one is bound to fail within oneself and for the children. The former because the problem of existence can only be solved by each one only for himself, and not by proxy; the latter because one lacks in the very qualities which one needs to guide the children in their own search for an answer (Art 85-6).

Because Martha's father failed to give her the love she requires to grow into a loving adult, she is unable to grow as a human being. Without the capacity to love, she can never produce love within herself or in her relationships with others. In a play which seems so throughly devoid of hope, there is still the slightest possiblity that Martha and George may find a way to love themselves and one another. Though love seems a long way from either's grasp at the end of the play, one knows that the two have at least eliminated the illusions of "pseudo-love" to lighten their load as they continue their quest for "the real thing."

IV. The Inability to Love Oneself

> NICK: Everybody's a flop to you! Your husband's a flop, I'm a flop. . . .
>
> MARTHA: You're all flops. I am the Earth Mother, and you're all flops. (More or less to herself) I disgust me (Woolf 189).
>
> CHARLIE: COGITO! ERGO! SUM! I THINK: THEREFORE, I AM!! (Seascape 108).
>
> Love for and understanding of one's own self cannot be separated from respect and love and understanding for another individual. The love for my own self is inseparably connected with the love for any other being (Art 49).

The previous sections of this study have each demonstrated that, for one reason or another, the characters in the plays of Edward Albee fail to love each other and, more importantly, do not love themselves. Whether the quest for love is abandoned (because it requires effort and possibly pain), sidetracked (by an inability to know the ways and/or means of love), or misguided (by the pursuit of various forms of "pseudo-love"), the characters each remain totally alone and unhappy since they do not possess a basic sense of love for self which would sustain them, even in times of isolation from others. The characters' quest for love is, more accurately, a search for self-love: for, as Erich Fromm tells us, "An attitude of love toward themselves will be found in all those who are capable of loving others" (Art 50).

Some critics have consistently misdiagnosed the problem of Albee's characters to be the inability to find a suitable, willing object of love. George Wellwarth, for example, says The Zoo Story

> is about the maddening effect that the enforced loneliness of the human condition has on the person who is cursed (for in our society it undoubtedly is a curse) with an infinite capacity to love (322).

A close examination of the play using Fromm's insight on love shows that Jerry has not "an infinite capacity for love" (as Wellwarth has suggested) but an inability to love at all. We have already seen that Jerry was abandoned by his parents when he was only a child. Consequenlty, he failed to develop a love for life or a love for himself--both of which are required, according to Fromm, before one can love another. We are given further insight into Jerry's faulty view of love in his description of what he considers to be his only experience with love:

> for a week and a half, when I was fifteen . . . and I hang myhead in shame that puberty was late . . . I was a h-o-m-o-s-e-x-u-a-l. I mean, I was queer. . . . . And for those eleven days, I met at least twice a day with the park superintendant's son . . . a Greek boy, whose birthday was the same as mine, except he was a year older. I think I was very much in love . . . maybe just with sex (Zoo Story 33).

Jerry realizes that the experience was probably based mostly on physical attraction--not love. Fromm's description of love further contradicts any implication that Jerry's relationship with the Greek boy constituted love:

> If a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to the rest of his fellow men, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egotism (Art 39).

Jerry does not reach out to any of the pathetic, unloved people with whom he shares the boarding house. He has "loved" only one person--the Greek boy--and, by Fromm's defintion, he has consequently never loved at all.

In Mary M. Nilan's article on The Zoo Story, she suggests that Jerry is only capable of loving himself and is, thus, incapable of loving anyone. She says of Jerry:

> Only once, he tells us, was he able to sustain a relationship for any duration and then only an

> adolescent homosexual one. Such a relationship tends to suggest the attraction of a "mirror image"; moreover, since the park superintendant's son's "birthday was the same," the two would seem to be symbolic twins. This indicates an egotistical union in which the individuals involved identify themselves with each other, merely enlarging the single individual into two (56-7).

What Nilan says is true to a point. Jerry's relationship with the Greek boy may, indeed, suggest Jerry's attraction to a "mirror image" of himself. However, Nilan fails to note a comment that Jerry makes later in the play which shows that the face he sees when he looks into a mirror is not the face of a person he loves. He explains to Peter that

> A person has to have some way of dealing with SOMETHING. If not with people . . . if not with people . . . SOMETHING. With a bed, with a cockroach, with a mirror . . . no, that's too hard, that's one of the last steps (Zoo Story 42).

Jerry's revelation about himself in this passage gives much insight into his real ability to love. Jerry correctly believes that the love of self is one of the most difficult steps in the process of achieving love. He also reveals that he incorrectly views self-love to be "one of the last steps," when it is, in fact the initial step. Jerry does not possess an "infinite capacity to love" as Wellwarth suggests, but instead, a complete inability to love himself--and thus an inability to love anyone else.

Albee's characters in A Delicate Balance use the mirror reference to show their realization that their failure to love others stems from their failure to love themselves. Near the end of the play, Edna realizes that her inconvenient stay at her "best friends'" house has revealed less to her about about their nature and more about her own:

> EDNA: We mustn't press out luck, must we: test. (Pause. Slight smile) It's sad to come to the end of it, isn't it, nearly the end; so much more of it gone by . . . than left, and still not know--still

> not have learned . . . the boundaries, what we may not do . . . not ask, for fear of looking in a mirror (Balance 163-4).

Edna's poignant realization is used by Albee to illustrate that he, like Erich Fromm, believes in the need for self-love as a prerequisite for loving others. In a moments of self-understanding, Agnes tells us that "We see ourselves repeated by those we bring into it all, either by mirror or rejection, honor or fault" (82). She is gradually aware that Julia's failures are mere repetitions of her own in a cycle which never ends once it has been set into motion. Claire's response to Tobias' self-analytical "If we do not love someone . . . never have loved someone . . ." shows a characteristic emphasis on the love of others (instead of a concentration on the love of self):

> CLAIRE: Oh, stop it! "Love" is not the problem. You love Agnes and Agnes loves Julia and Julia loves me and I love you. We all love each other, yes we do. We love each other (37).

The truth of the matter is tacit in Claire's summation. Agnes does not love Agnes, Julia does not love Julia, Claire does not love Claire, etc. Inasmuch as each fails to love himself (or herself), none is able to love anyone else until self-love is achieved.

In All Over, the Wife and the Daughter exchange numerous remarks which show their mutual self-hatred. At one point, however, the Wife goes beneath the surface and points out the causes for her lack of love for the Daughter:

> THE WIFE [To THE DAUGHTER]: That is probably what I have come to love you so little for--that you love yourself so litle. Don't ever tell me how to make a life, or anyone who does things out of love, or even affection (44).

Once again, the Wife blames her Daughter for a failure for which she, as the girl's mother, is at least partially to blame. Had the Wife loved

herself enough to instill in her Daughter a sense of self-love, the girl's life might well have been different. It is "All over" for each of the characters primarily because none has developed a vital love of self. Without self-love, they cannot love one another and their separateness seems eternal. To avoid any further waste of time, each must make the first move to defeat "the sins of the father" by earnestly searching for a self-love which can be put in place of the love already lost. Otherwise, the possibilities for one's happiness are all determined by one's parents during childhood and, hence, those who experience a loveless childhood may as well lie down and die during adolescence. Albee and Fromm do not want Man to waste his time because of "the sins of the fathers." One must learn from the mistakes of the past, not live them.

Thomas E. Porter has said that "the 'convention' that is being attacked in Virginia Woolf is the notion that we can expect salvaton from without" (245). For George and Martha cannot rely on each other to give them the love they need. They must love themselves first, and the love of others will, most assuredly, follow naturally. Martha must face the fact that she is a "flop" and work to change those things about herself that she doesn't like. She is sensitive, compassionate, and alive. She possesses all the necessary qualities to defeat self-hatred if she would only make the effort and apply what she has. She need ónly give herself credit for her positive attributes to receive credit from others. Ultimately, she must realize that the credit of others is incidental and unnecessary so long as she loves herself.

In concluding, let us look at one Albee play where the characters do do something right, where they respond positively rather than negatively to the challenges of love. In Albee's Seascape because their attitudes

are self-contained, Charlie and Nancy succeed in life and in love where the other characters routinely fail. Nancy is "awake" and bursting with life as she considers the time she has left. As she gazes out at the sea, she concentrates on the past only long enough to confirm the fact that she has been successful in life thus far, and that the future promises to be as challenging and rewarding as the past. She has been a good mother to her children, a faithful wife, a compassionate lover, and an energetic partner for Charlie. Therefore, when he takes a step toward retreat and a "giving up" on life, Nancy jerks him up by the collar and denies him a figurative death. For Charlie and Nancy do love themselves and they are consequently able to love life and one another. The pain of consciousness which invariably accompanies the promise of love has not frightened the two away from "dangerous involvement." Instead, the two have delved into the unknown to find that life is fuller, more meaningful, more worthwhile because both have had the courage to face it unguarded. The childlike innocence of the two is a fresh way of thinking as opposed to an immature way of acting. Their childlike approach allows them to "See Everything Twice!" and to maintain a vision of the future which is, at once, realistic and promising (Seascape 10).

Nancy's love of herself and her life does, in fact, produce more love; and because of that love, Charlie is able to shake off his temporary "slumber" to stand shoulder to shoulder with his wife in an attempt to explain the puzzles of the world to Leslie and Sarah. "I THINK: THEREFORE, I AM," he tells Leslie, thereby deciding to stay alive, happy, loving, and, consequently, loved.

The final line of Albee's Seascape is a challenge to all of the characters who people his plays and all the audiences who fill the theaters

where his drama are performed. "Begin," says Leslie the Lizard, asking for the "dangerous involvement" that is required if love is ever to be found. Thanks to such advice in the drama of Edward Albee, those who leave his plays are closer to owning the equipment necessary to live full and rewarding lives.

Notes

[1]Albee quoted in "Albee: Odd Man In on Broadway," Newsweek 4 Feb. 1963: 50.

[2]For more detailed analysis of childishness, immature behavior, and game-playing in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? see Charlene M. Taylor, "Coming of Age in New Carthage: Albee's Grown-up Children," Educational Theater Journal 25 (March 1973): 53-65; Louis Paul, "A Game Analysis of Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: The Core of Grief," Literature and Psychology 17 (1967): 47-51; Anthony C. Hilfer, "George and Martha: Sad, Sad, Sad," in Seven Contemporary Authors, ed. Thomas B. Whitbread (Austin: U of Texas P, 1968) 119-39; and, Joy Flasch, "Games People Play in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Modern Drama 10 (Dec. 1967): 280-8.

Works Cited

Albee, Edward. The Plays: Volume One (The Zoo Story, The Death of Bessie Smith, The Sandbox, and The American Dream). New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1981.

---. The Plays: Volume Two (Tiny Alice, A Delicate Balance, Box, and Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung). New York: Atheneum, 1981.

---. The Plays: Volume Three (All Over, Seascape, Counting the Ways, and Listening). New York: Atheneum, 1982.

---. Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? College ed. New York: Atheneum, 1980.

"Albee: Odd Man In on Broadway." Newsweek 4 Feb. 1963: 49-52.

Finkelstein, Sidney. "Cold War, Religious Revival and Family Alienation: William Stryon, J.D. Salinger and Edward Albee." In Existentialism and Alienation in American Literature. New York: International P, 1965. 211-42.

Fromm, Erich. The Art of Loving. New York: Harper & Row, 1956.

---. The Sane Society. New York: Twayne, 1972.

Gabbard, Lucina P. "At the Zoo: From O'Neill to Albee." Modern Drama 19 (Dec. 1976): 365-74.

---. "Edward Albee's Triptych on Abandonment." Twentieth-Century Literature 28 (1982): 14-33.

Hausdorff, Don. Erich Fromm. New York: Twayne, 1972.

Hilfer, Anthony C. "George and Martha: Sad, Sad, Sad." Seven Contemporary Authors. Ed. Thomas B. Whitbread. Austin: U of Texas P, 1968. 119-39.

Hirsch, Foster. Who's Afraid of Edward Albee? Berkeley, CA: Creative Arts Books, 1976.

Josephson, Eric and Mary. Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society. New York: Dell, 1962.

Mac Nicholas, John. "Edward Albee." Dictionary of Literary Bibliography. Vol. 7. Ed. John Mac Nicholas. Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1981. 3-23.

Moses, Robbie Odom. "Death as a Mirror of Life: Edward Albee's All Over." Modern Drama 19 (March 1976): 67-77.

Nilan, Mary M. "Albee's The Zoo Story: Alienated Man and the Nature of Love." Modern Drama 16 (June, 1973): 55-9.

Porter, M. Gilbert. "Toby's Last Stand: The Evanescence of Commitment in A Delicate Balance." Theatre Journal 31 (Oct. 1979): 398-408.

Porter, Thomas E. "Fun and Games in Suburbia: Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Myth and Modern Drama. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State UP, 1969. 225-47.

Roudane, Matthew C. "An Interview with Edward Albee." Southern Humanities Review 16 (1982): 40-5.

Stenz, Anita Maria. Edward Albee: The Poet of Loss. New York: Mouton, 1978.

Taylor, Charlene M. "Coming of Age in New Carthage: Albee's Grown-Up Children." Educational Theater Journal 25 (March 1973): 53-65.

Vos, Nevlin. "The Process of Dying in the Plays of Edward Albee." Educational Theater Journal 25 (March 1973): 80-5.

Weales, Gerald. "Edward Albee: Don't Make Waves." The Jumping-Off Place: American Drama in the 1960s. New York: Macmillan, 1969. 24-53.

Wellwarth, George E. "Edward Albee." The Theater of Protest and Paradox. Rev. ed. New York: New York UP, 1971. 321-36.

Williams, Tennessee. *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. New York: Signet, 1955.